

# It so happened . . .

Supplementary Reader for Class VIII

MODERN ENGLISH





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Text book

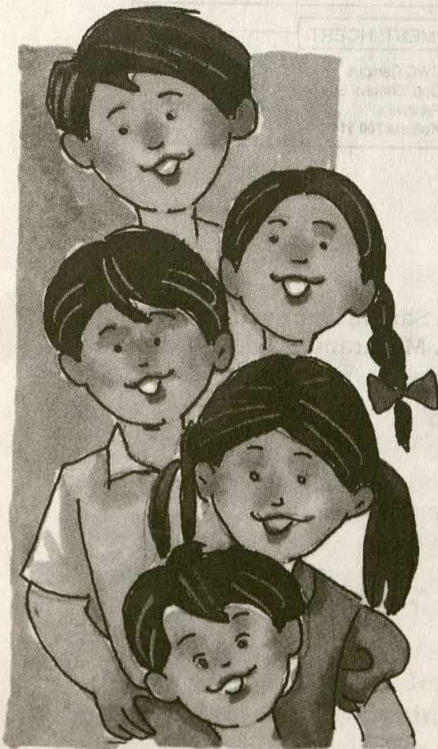
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Modern English

# It so happened...

Supplementary Reader for Class VIII

NASIRUDDIN KHAN



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्  
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## **Foreword**

LANGUAGE learning occupies a central position in the total educational process. The *National Curriculum Framework for School Education-2000* (NCFSE-2000) envisages language education as integral to learners' emotional, social and cognitive development. While nurturing children's natural curiosity, creativity and imagination, language learning seeks to encourage in them independent thinking and free and effective expression of ideas and opinions. It combines acquisition of essential language abilities with inculcation of core life-skills as well as positive attitudes, values and habits conducive to the overall development of their personality.

As a follow-up of the NCFSE-2000, new syllabuses in all subject areas were designed followed by the development of new instructional materials for various school stages. *It So Happened ...*, the present supplementary reader in English for Class VIII, forms part of a new series entitled *Modern English* for the upper primary stage. The package for each class consists of a textbook, a workbook and a supplementary reader.

This supplementary reader, the third and last in the series, is based on the new syllabus in English designed in response to the changing social and pedagogic needs as well as the growing importance of English as the language of international communication. It contains a set of ten pieces in line with learners' life experiences and interests emphasising understanding of their immediate environment — physical, social and cultural — and inculcation of desirable values and attitudes with no attempt at being explicitly didactic or exhortative at any point. Each story has been divided into two or three parts, each part opening with a set of pithy sentences summarising it without revealing the crucial points of the story. The volume of the book is expected to be manageable in all respects.

I am very grateful to all the participants of the Review Workshop who contributed generously to the development and finalisation of



the manuscript of this book. I hope that the book will enthuse learners to be actively involved with its content and provide ample opportunities for peer collaboration and support, and outlets for learning, reflection and enjoyment.

The Council will welcome teachers' and students' comments on any aspect of this book and their suggestions for its improvement.

J. S. RAJPUT

Director

National Council of Educational  
Research and Training

New Delhi

September 2003



# **A Note for the Teacher**

THE main objective of this supplementary reader is to promote among learners the habit of reading independently with interest, understanding and enjoyment. It seeks to enable them to read independently in the sense that they would not expect the book to be taken up page by page in the classroom. They would rather read it on their own and later share and confirm their responses and appreciation with the teacher and the peer group through discussions, questions and, wherever possible, even role-play.

The book contains ten pieces. Each piece has been divided into two or three manageable parts, each part briefly summarised in point form without revealing crucial turns and twists of the storyline, thus sustaining readers' curiosity and interest. This format is being tried to make comprehension easier and concentration keener. Each piece is followed by a set of questions as aids to understanding and, at places, ideas for discussion.

Questions may be attempted orally before well-formulated answers are put down on paper. Discussion on related topics should be encouraged so that learners get an opportunity to go beyond the book and feel inspired to reach hitherto undiscovered vistas of knowledge and pleasure.

The stories, amply illustrated, deal with themes of cooperation, compassion, respect for elders, sound decision-making and adventure. It is hoped that learners will find the book enjoyable and rewarding.





## ***Gandhiji's Talisman***

*I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test:*

*Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?*

*Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.*

*M. K. Gandhi*





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# **CONSTITUTION OF INDIA**

## **Part IV A**

### **Fundamental Duties of Citizens**

#### **ARTICLE 51A**

**Fundamental Duties – It shall be the duty of every citizen of India —**

- (a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;
- (b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
- (c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;
- (d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;
- (e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
- (f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
- (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures;
- (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;
- (i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;
- (j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.



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# 1

## How the Camel got his hump



### I

- *The world had just begun, and the animals were working for humans.*
- *There was one lazy animal that did nothing, and said nothing but 'Humph'.*
- *Even the clever Djinn was at his wit's end.*

In the beginning, when the world was new and the Animals were just beginning to work for Man, there was a Camel, and he lived in the middle of a Howling Desert because he did not want to work. He ate sticks and thorns and prickles, and when anybody spoke to him he said "Humph!" Just "Humph!" and no more.

Presently the Horse came to him on Monday morning, with a saddle on his back and said, "Camel, O Camel, come out and trot like the rest of us."

---

**Djinn** (pronounced here as 'jin' and variously spelt as 'genie', 'genii', 'jinni', 'jinnee', 'djinni', 'djinnny'): a spirit that has strange powers and can assume any form, human or animal



*It so happened . . .*

"Humph!" said the Camel, and the Horse went away and told the Man.

Presently the Dog came to him, with a stick in his mouth, and said, "Camel, O Camel, come and fetch and carry like the rest of us."

"Humph!" said the Camel, and the Dog went away and told the Man.

Presently the Ox came to him, with the yoke on his neck, and said, "Camel, O Camel, come and plough like the rest of us."

"Humph!" said the Camel, and the Ox went away and told the Man.

At the end of the day the Man called the Horse and the Dog and the Ox together, and said, "Three, O Three, I'm very sorry for you; but that Humph-thing in the Desert can't work, or he would have been here by now, so I am going to leave him alone, and you must work double-time to make up for it."







That made the Three very angry, and they held a panchayat on the edge of the Desert; and the Camel came chewing cud and laughed at them. Then he said "Humph!" and went away again.

Presently there came along the Djinn who was in charge of All Deserts, rolling in a cloud of dust.

"Djinn of All Deserts," said the Horse, "is it right for anyone to be idle?"

"Certainly not," said the Djinn.

"Well," said the Horse, "there's a thing in the middle of your Desert with a long neck and long legs, and he hasn't done a stroke of work since Monday morning. He won't trot."

"Whew!" said the Djinn, whistling, "that's my Camel. What does he say about it?"

"He says 'Humph!', and he won't plough," said the Ox.

"Very good," said the Djinn. "I'll humph him if you will kindly wait a minute."

- *The Djinn remonstrated with the Camel, who said "Humph".*
- *The Camel's beautiful back suddenly grew a lump, which was the camel's hump.*
- *The Djinn assured the Camel his hump would always be a help, not a hindrance.*

The Djinn rolled himself up in his dust-cloak, and took a walk across the Desert, and found the Camel looking at his own reflection in a pool of water.

"My friend," said the Djinn, "what's this I hear of your doing no work?"

The Djinn sat down, with his chin in his hand, while the Camel looked at his own reflection in the pool of water.

**I'll humph him:** I'll deal with him appropriately./I'll set him right.  
**remonstrated:** protested/complained



*It so happened . . .*



"You've given the Three extra work ever since Monday morning, all on account of your idleness," said the Djinn. And he went on thinking with his chin in his hand.

"Humph!" said the Camel.

"I shouldn't say that again if I were you," said the Djinn; "you might say it once too often. I want you to work."

And the Camel said "Humph!" again; but no sooner had he said it than he saw his back, that he was so proud of, puffing up and puffing up into a great big hump.

"Do you see that?" said the Djinn. "That's your very own humph that you've brought upon your very own self by not working. Today is Thursday, and you've done no work since Monday, when the work began. Now you are going to work."

"How can I," said the Camel, "with this humph on my back?"

"That has a purpose," said the Djinn, "all because you missed those three days. You will be able to work now for three days without eating, because you can live on your humph; and don't you ever say I never did anything for you. Come out of the Desert and go to the Three, and behave."





## *How the Camel got his hump*

And the Camel went away to join the Three. And from that day to this the Camel always wears a hump (we call it 'hump' now, not to hurt his feelings); but he has never yet caught up with the three days that he missed at the beginning of the world, and he has never yet learned how to behave.

### **ACTIVITIES**

#### **COMPREHENSION**

##### **Discuss**

- Take up each of the following items in small groups.
  - Let the group discuss the item and arrive at a common answer.
  - The groups should then compare the common points with one another.
  - Do not write your answers. Speak them clearly.
1. What tasks, do you think, were assigned to the dog and the ox?
  2. The camel was looking at his own reflection in the pool. What does it suggest to you about the camel?
  3. "... he has never yet learnt to behave." In the light of this, what is the writer's opinion about the camel?

##### **Write**

1. Why did the camel live in the middle of the desert?
2. What made the dog, the horse and the ox very angry?
3. How did the Djinn know the horse was complaining against the camel?
4. The camel said "Humph" repeatedly. How did it affect him?
5. What, according to the Djinn, was the use of the hump?

*For the Teacher:* **Discuss** stands for discussion of items in small groups, arriving at a common point of view, if possible, and presenting it orally to the whole class. **Write** stands for writing well-formulated answers or compositions. This pattern will apply to all the activities given at the end of each lesson.



## II

- If we remain idle, we will grow a hump far worse than the camel's.
- The only cure for bad temper and boredom is to work tirelessly.
- Having enough to do is like having everything, and no hump either.

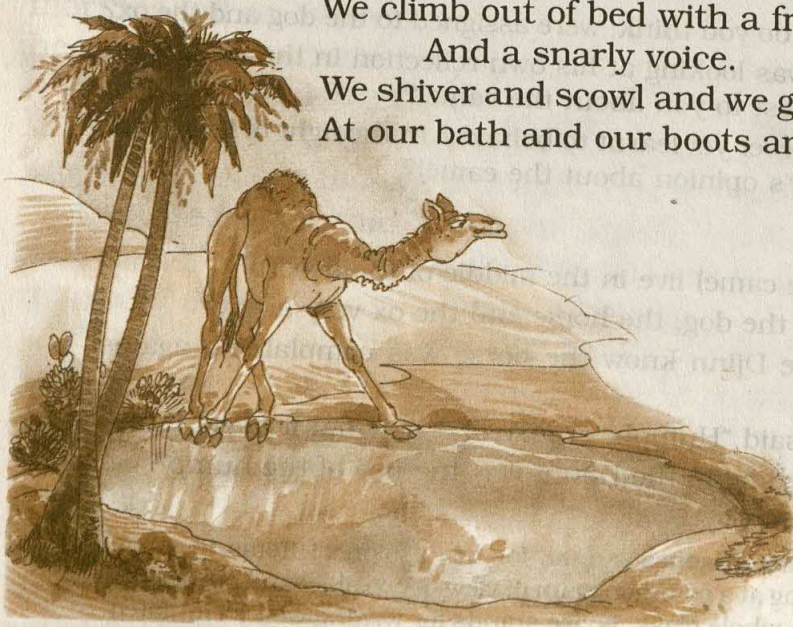
The Camel's hump is an ugly lump  
Which well you may see at the Zoo;  
But uglier yet is the hump we get  
From having too little to do.

Kiddies and grown-ups too-oo-oo,  
If we haven't enough to do-oo-oo,

We get the hump—  
The horrible hump—  
The hump that is black and blue!

We climb out of bed with a frowsy head  
And a snarly voice.

We shiver and scowl and we grunt and we growl  
At our bath and our boots and our toys;



**frowsy:** unclean (here unclear/unsteady)    **snarly:** angry



## *How the Camel got his hump*

The cure for this ill is not to sit still,  
 Or frowst with a book by the fire;  
 But to take a large hoe and a shovel also,  
 And dig till you gently perspire.

And then you will find that the sun and the wind  
 And the Djinn of the Garden too,  
 Have lifted the hump—  
 The horrible hump—  
 The hump that is black and blue!

I get it as well as you-oo-oo  
 If I haven't enough to do-oo-oo  
 We get the humph—  
 The horrible humph—  
 Kiddies and grown-ups too!

RUDYARD KIPLING  
 [slightly abridged]

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. What is more ugly than the camel's hump?
2. Complete the sentence given below.  
 Little ones and grown-ups are likely to get the hump...
3. (i) Which stanza is all about bad temper and foul mood? Read it aloud.  
 (ii) What is the cure suggested?

**frowst:** 'frowsty' means stale or stuffy (here it suggests boredom and listlessness)



*It so happened ...*

4. "And then you will find ..." 'Then' here means 'after that'. Say what precedes 'then' and what follows it in the given context.

### **Discuss**

What did you do over the weekend? Were you generally active or idle? Check your back before starting the discussion.

### **THINK IT OVER**

- All work is dignified; there is no such thing as 'menial work'.
  - He who struggles is better than he who never attempts.
  - There are broadly two categories of workers — those who do not postpone till tomorrow what they can do today, and those who do not postpone till tomorrow what they can do the day after.
- Where do you belong?

### **ACTIVITIES**

#### **COMPREHENSION**

Write

1. What is more ugly than the example of a man who does not work?
2. Complete the sentence given below.  
Little ones and grown-ups are likely to get the same thing if they do not work.
3. (i) Which sentence is all about a man who does not work?  
It is about a man who does not work.  
(ii) What is the main suggestion?



# 2

## The selfish Giant



### I

- *The Giant's garden was beautiful, and children loved to play in it.*
- *The Giant, who was selfish, built a high wall round his lovely garden.*
- *Children did not enter the garden thereafter. Nor did Spring and Summer till the Giant experienced a change of heart.*

EVERY afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the Giant's garden.

It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the springtime broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "How happy we are here!" they cried to each other.



One day the Giant came back. He had been to visit his friend, the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years were over he had said all that he had to say, for his conversation was limited, and he determined to return to his own castle. When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden.

"What are you doing here?" he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away.

"My own garden is my own garden," said the Giant; "anyone can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." So he built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice-board.

TRESPASSERS  
WILL BE  
PROSECUTED

He was a very selfish Giant.

The poor children had now nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high walls when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside. "How happy we were there!" they said to each other.

Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still winter. The birds did not care to sing in it as there were no children, and the trees forgot to blossom. Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it

**Cornish ogre:** a giant of Cornwall **ogre:** (in legends and fairy stories) a cruel giant who eats people; (in common usage) a very frightening person **gruff:** rough; surly **trespassers:** those who enter somebody's land/property without his permission **prosecuted:** tried in a court of law (here punished)





slipped back into the ground again, and went off to sleep. The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost. "Spring has forgotten this garden," they cried, "so we will live here all the year round." The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them, and he came. He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimney-pots down. "This is a delightful spot," he said, "we must ask Hail on a visit." So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice.

**Snow, Frost, North Wind, Hail:** All these have been presented as characters or persons. North Wind is the chilly wind, and Hail is the hailstorm.



"I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the Selfish Giant, as he sat at the window and looked out at his cold, white garden; "I hope there will be a change in the weather."

But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden she gave none. "He is too selfish," she said. So it was always Winter there, and the North Wind and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.

One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It sounded so sweet to his ears that he thought it must be the King's musicians passing by. It was really only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird singing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring, and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement. "I believe the Spring has come at last," said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Discuss

1. Describe the Giant's garden in your own words.
2. Is there something like this garden near where you live? Would you like one, without the Giant perhaps?

**linnet:** a brownish songbird found in Europe    **casement:** window that opens on hinges like a door



**Write**

1. Why is the Giant called selfish?
2. On one occasion the children said: "How happy we are here!" Later they said: "How happy we were there!" What were they referring to in both the cases?
3. (i) When Spring came, it was still Winter in the garden. What does 'Winter' stand for or indicate here?  
(ii) 'Winter' has been presented like a story with its own characters and their activities. Describe the story in your own words.
4. (i) Was the Giant happy or sad over the state of the garden?  
(ii) How did Autumn punish the Giant for being selfish?
5. What effect did the linnet's song have over Hail and the North Wind?

**II**

- *To celebrate the return of the children, trees covered themselves with birds and blossoms.*
- *The Giant was delighted to see his friends back, especially a little boy whom he loved dearly.*
- *The little boy soon disappeared only to return much later.*

He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene. Only in one corner it was still winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still covered with frost and snow, and the North





Wind was blowing and roaring above it. "Climb up, little boy!" said the Tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the boy was too tiny.

And the Giant's heart melted as he looked out. "How selfish I have been!" he said; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done.

So he crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly, and went out into the garden. But when the children saw him they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became winter again. Only the little boy did not run, for his eyes





were so full of tears that he did not see the Giant coming. And the Giant stole up behind him and took him gently in his hands, and put him up into the tree. And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round the Giant's neck, and kissed him. And the other children, when they saw that the Giant was not wicked any longer, came running back, and with them came the Spring. "It is your garden now, little children," said the Giant, and he took a great axe and knocked down the wall. And when the people were going to market at twelve o'clock they found the Giant playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen.

**stole up:** came quietly without being noticed



All day long they played, and in the evening they came to the Giant to bid him good-bye.

"But where is your little companion?" he said; "the boy I put into the tree?" The Giant loved him the best because he had kissed him.

"We don't know," answered the children. "He has gone away."

"You must tell him to be sure and come tomorrow," said the Giant. But the children said that they did not know where he lived, and had never seen him before; and the Giant felt very sad.

Every afternoon, when school was over, the children came and played with the Giant. But the little boy whom the Giant loved was never seen again. The Giant was very kind to all the children, yet he longed for his little friend, and often spoke of him. "How I would like to see him!" he used to say.

Years went by, and the Giant grew very old and feeble. He could not play about anymore, so he sat in a huge armchair, and watched the children at their games and admired his garden. "I have many beautiful flowers," he said; "but the children are the most beautiful flowers of all."

One winter morning he looked out of his window as he was dressing. He did not hate the winter now, for he knew that it was merely the Spring asleep, and that the flowers were resting.

Suddenly he rubbed his eyes in wonder and looked and looked. It certainly was a marvellous sight. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were golden, and silver fruit hung down from them, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved.

Downstairs ran the Giant in great joy, and out into the garden. He hastened across the grass, and came near to the child. And when he came quite close his face grew red with anger, and he said, "Who hath dared to wound thee?" For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.





"Who hath dared to wound thee?" cried the Giant; "tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him."

"Nay!" answered the child: "but these are the wounds of Love."

"Who art thou?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child.

And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, "You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me to my garden, which is paradise."

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.

OSCAR WILDE

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

- (i) "He saw a most wonderful sight." What did he see?  
(ii) What did he realise on seeing it?
- Why was it still winter in one corner of the garden?
- Describe the first meeting of the little boy and the Giant.
- Describe their second meeting after a long interval.
- The Giant lay dead, all covered with white blossoms. What does this sentence indicate about the once selfish Giant?

#### Discuss

The little child's hands and feet had marks of nails. Who does the child remind you of? Give a reason for your answer.

#### THINK IT OVER

- Selfless love involves suffering for others.
- Owning things is human; sharing them is divine.

**slay:** kill   **nay:** no   **Who art thou?:** Who are you?



# 3

## Speedy



### I

- Adilpur was a peaceful town inhabited by exceptionally honest and upright people.
- In case an untoward incident occurred, which was rare, people followed an age-old local custom.
- Speedy, a prize horse, was his owner's favourite but his glory was overtaken by disaster on a fateful night.

AGES ago, when the earth was a peaceful planet inhabited mostly by humans who were virtuous of conduct and blameless of character, there was a town known as Adilpur in a certain part of our country. People of Adilpur were very compassionate and honest. Injustice and trickery were as alien to them as truth and fair play are to some in the modern world. If, once in a blue moon, someone in Adilpur was unjust and unkind or so much

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**virtuous of conduct:** their conduct showed moral goodness and excellence  
**compassionate:** kind and caring    **once in a blue moon:** rarely



as told an unnecessary lie, the news of that event engulfed the town like a mysterious disease. People would talk about it for weeks on end, and the administrators would eventually have the story engraved on one of the rocks that lay scattered around the town. Alas! Adilpur and its noble inhabitants vanished long ago leaving behind nothing but a few tales that are avidly told and heard to this day by old men and women in remote Indian villages.

One of the inhabitants of Adilpur was a prosperous merchant who had his business spread all over the known world. Our country, famous for its fine fabrics even then, let the rest of humanity have its merchandise through this clever merchant in exchange for wares produced beyond the seas. Thus, in a short time, the merchant amassed enormous wealth and owned everything that money could buy. He owned dozens of elephants and hundreds of horses. In one of his stables, there was a priceless Arab steed, white as snow, whom he loved like his own son. He called the horse Speedy. When Speedy ran with the master on his back, lightning alone could pretend to follow them at a safe distance.

One day the merchant was hoping to receive a load of goods from abroad at a certain hour in the evening. He waited and waited till the hour was long past, but no sign of cartloads could be seen. 'This delay is inexplicable,' thought the merchant. What could have happened on the way? He had Speedy saddled up at once and rode off in the direction where the carts would be moving in. It was a wet and windy evening full of the croaking of frogs and the buzzing of invisible beetles. Without noticing where he was heading, he had crossed the frontiers of the town passing now through a dense forest. The humming of insects had been replaced by the feeble trotting of approaching horses. 'Now what's

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**engulfed:** surrounded/enveloped    **avidly:** with great interest and eagerness  
**merchandise:** goods; products



*It so happened . . .*



that?' the merchant wondered. It had to be an army of ghosts if it was not a band of robbers. Whatever it was, Speedy needed no spur to show his talent. The merchant whistled and Speedy stormed ahead like the wind's own cousin and went on and on till having surveyed half the world they returned home safe though tired. Speedy stood drenched in sweat and foaming at the mouth. One of his legs hung loose as if it had nothing to do with the rest of his body. His glory was gone. He was ill.

Days passed but Speedy showed no sign of improvement. His legs were thin and his eyes were weak. Full of gratitude to the horse for saving his life more than once, the merchant was alarmed by his worsening condition. Was Speedy ever going to recover? Perhaps not!

He had expended every ounce of his energy that fateful night. Now he needed looking after. The merchant ordered the

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**expended:** spent/exhausted    **fateful:** important and decisive (suggesting unpleasant events)

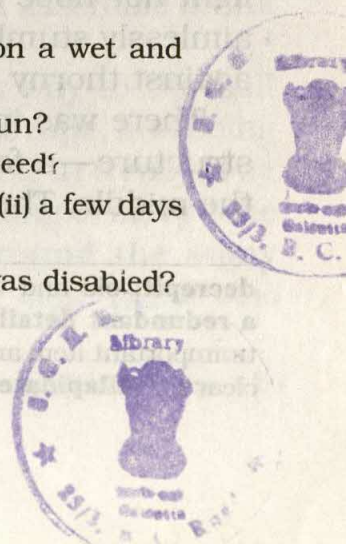


## COMPREHENSION

1. (i) Pick out some phrases used in the opening lines to describe the people of Adilpur.  
(ii) Pick out the phrase which means the opposite of 'truth and fair play'.

1. (i) Mention a few events which the people of Adilpur thought very unusual.  
(ii) How did they react to those events?
2. (i) What was traditionally done in case a shocking event occurred?  
(ii) Why, in your view, was it done?
3. What did the merchant supply in exchange for goods from abroad?
4. What was the merchant's most precious possession? Why did he rate it so highly?
5. Why did the merchant decide to go on a ride on a wet and windy evening?
6. Why did he let the horse break into his fastest run?
7. What was the result of the run with lightning speed?
8. Describe the condition of Speedy (i) immediately, (ii) a few days after the unfortunate ride.
9. How did the merchant treat the horse after he was disabled?

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## II

- *Speedy lived happily in retirement only briefly.*
- *Lame and blind, he found his way to the hall where the gong hung.*
- *The story of Speedy's misfortune evoked instant justice, and humanised his master, the wayward merchant.*

Speedy thus lived a comfortable life in retirement. But happiness has a way of being short-lived as much for humans as for horses. After a few weeks, it occurred to the merchant that Speedy required no more than four kilograms of ordinary gram. Shortly afterwards, he decided that since Speedy was not called upon to do any work, his feed should also be appropriately curtailed. Just about two kilograms of hay once a day was enough. Too much nourishment will do no good to a decrepit animal. Speedy, once the apple of everybody's eye, was now blind and lame and ugly—a redundant detail in a scheme of priorities.

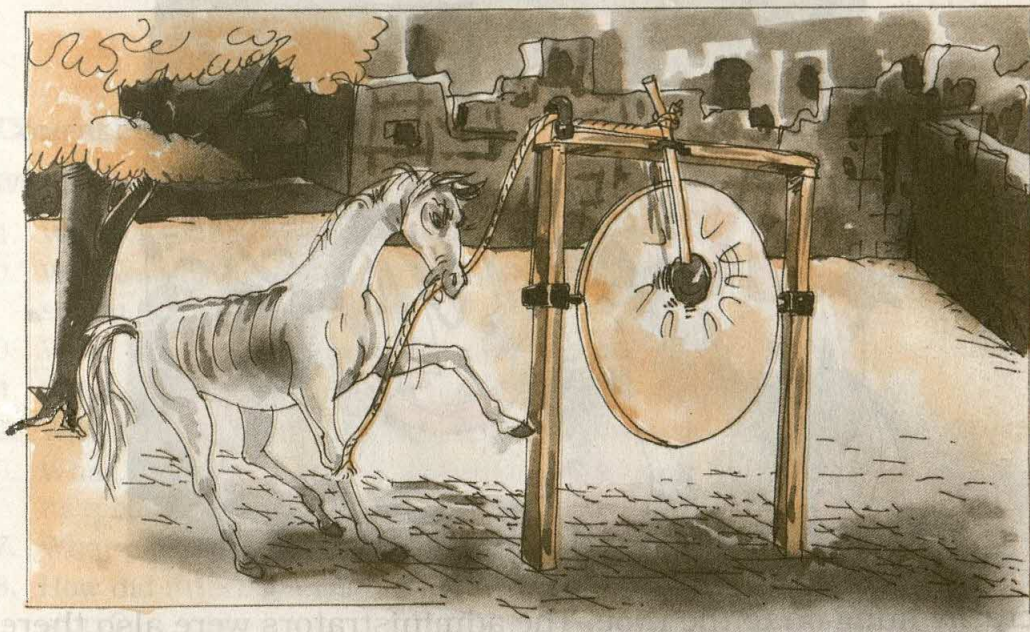
The worst was yet to come. It dawned on the merchant that Speedy had better be outside the stable than inside it if he was to survive. "Drive him out so that nature takes over. If he is obstinate, use the whip," proclaimed the merchant. On a wet afternoon, Speedy found himself out in the open more bruised than baffled. By now he knew something of the ways of the world. It rained part of the night. The morning brought neither light nor hope but pangs of hunger which forced him to move aimlessly stumbling against stones and scraping his bony sides against thorny bushes.

There was in Adilpur a vast clearing on which stood an old structure—a fort-like stony complex with a dilapidated hall in the middle. There were no doors anywhere and you could walk

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**decrepit:** old and weak    **the apple of everybody's eye:** everybody's favourite  
**a redundant detail in a scheme of priorities:** Speedy is now an unnecessary/unimportant item among other very important items/things    **dawned on:** became clear to  
**dilapidated:** crumbling/falling to pieces.





across from one end to the other. There was a big brass gong in the centre of the hall. A thick rope fastened to the metal pendulum swung over the ground. If you held the rope and shook it, the gong clamoured like a piteous complainant demanding justice. According to the age-old custom, if anyone in Adilpur wanted to make a complaint against a neighbour, a relative, a friend or a foe, that person would come there and give the rope a couple of shakes. The entire town would then assemble in the fort and the matter would be settled in no time.

As luck would have it, Speedy crawled his way to the hall where the gong was. He accidentally touched the rope, and being very hungry he closed his jaws on it tugging at it in frenzy. The gong made the usual clamour and in the twinkling of an eye the whole population of Adilpur had collected round the stony complex demanding details about a blind and lame horse who

**clamoured:** made clamour/noise    **piteous:** arousing pity    **complainant:** one who has a complaint to make



*It so happened . . .*



crazily hung on to the rope. The administrators were also there and they soon knew the story of the horse. A strange scene it was—Speedy stood motionless on one side, and on the other waited the merchant with eyes downcast and head hung in shame. The administrators were quick in pronouncing the judgment. The merchant was indeed guilty. He had wronged an animal. Could there be a bigger crime ever committed by humans? They asked and got no answer. The merchant went up to Speedy, put his arms round his neck, and kissed him on the face. He then loudly begged Speedy's forgiveness and promised to love him always like his own son.

Inscriptions were later engraved by the administrators on a stone wall which, people say, still lies buried under a huge boulder near where the gong stood mute for a long time.

ZAKIR HUSAIN  
[retold]

**boulder:** rock





## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. Why was Speedy's feed gradually curtailed?
2. Why was he driven out of the stable? What did the merchant say to justify this cruelty?
3. What was the purpose of the gong hanging in the hall?
4. What happened if someone pulled the rope to sound the gong?
5. What made Speedy pull the rope? What was the result?
6. What, according to the administrators, was the crime the merchant had committed?
7. What did the merchant do to redress the wrong?
8. How did future generations in Adilpur come to know Speedy's story?

#### Discuss

1. "A strange scene it was ..." Describe the scene in your own words.
2. "... the gong stood mute for a long time." What does it suggest about happenings in Adilpur after the Speedy episode?

### THINK IT OVER

- People don't notice goodness because it is transparent like water and air; only if it runs out does it become noticeable.
- Those who respect life respect animals.
- A busy official known for his love of animals was once passing through a village in a cart. Suddenly he asked the cartman to stop and tried to hear what sounded like a wail from far away. The cartman asked, "Is it someone you know?" The official replied, "No, it's a dog I don't know."



# 4

## The enchanted shirt



- A certain king, though hale and hearty, believed he was ill.
- Many doctors came but to no avail, and were put to death.
- Of the two who called last, one was spared because he suggested a novel treatment.

The King was sick. His cheek was red,  
And his eyes were clear bright;  
He ate and drank with a kingly zest,  
And peacefully snored at night.

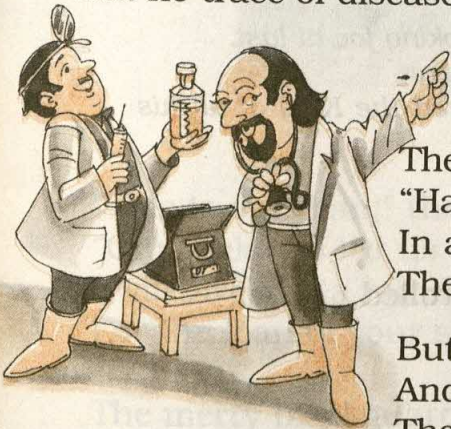
But he said he was sick, and a King should know,  
And doctors came by the score;  
They did not cure him. He cut off their heads,  
And sent to the schools for more.



At last two famous doctors came,  
And one was as poor as a rat;  
He had passed his life in studious toil,  
And never found time to grow fat.

The other had never looked in a book;  
His patients gave him no trouble;  
If they recovered they paid him well,  
If they died their heirs paid double.

Together they looked at the royal tongue,  
As the King on his couch reclined;  
In succession they thumped his august chest,  
But no trace of disease could find.



The old sage said, "You're as sound as a nut."  
"Hang him up!" roared the king, in a gale—  
In a ten-knot gale—of royal rage.  
The other leech grew a shade pale.

But he pensively rubbed his sagacious nose,  
And thus his prescription ran—  
The King will be well if he sleeps one night  
In the shirt of a Happy Man.

Wide o'er the realm the couriers rode,  
And fast their horses ran;  
And many they saw, and to many they spoke,  
But they found no Happy Man.

**studious toil:** working extremely hard at his studies **heirs** (pronounced as 'airs'): successors **august:** grand; royal **gale:** a strong wind (The King's anger was like a strong, destructive wind.) **pensively:** thoughtfully **sagacious:** showing wisdom and good judgment



**ACTIVITIES****COMPREHENSION****Write**

1. Was the King sick? If your answer is 'no', give a reason for it.
2. What became of the doctors who couldn't help the King?
3. Two doctors, who came last, were unlike each other. Mention some of their dissimilarities.
4. What made one of them turn "a shade pale"?
5. (i) What did the doctor prescribe for the King?  
(ii) Do you find it unusual in any way?

- *The couriers found the man they were looking for, at last.*
- *Though a pauper, he was a truly happy man.*
- *His story, and that of many others, cured the King of all his complaints.*

At last they came to a village gate,  
A beggar lay whistling there;  
He whistled and sang and laughed and rolled  
On the grass in the soft June air.

The weary couriers paused and looked  
At the scamp so blithe and gay;  
And one of them said, "Heaven save you, friend!  
You seem to be happy today."

"O yes, fair sirs!" the rascal laughed,  
And his voice rang free and glad;  
"An idle man has so much to do  
That he never has time to be sad."

**scamp:** playful, mischievous person



*The enchanted shirt*

"This is our man," the couriers said,  
 "Our luck has led us aright;  
 I will give you a hundred ducats, friend,  
 For the loan of your shirt tonight."

The merry blackguard lay back on the grass,  
 And laughed till his face was black;  
 "I would do it, God knows," and he roared with the fun,  
 "But I haven't a shirt to my back."

Each day to the King the reports came in  
 Of his unsuccessful spies,  
 And the sad panorama of human woes  
 Passed daily under his eyes.

**ducats** (rhymes with 'buckets'): gold or silver coins (former currency of most European countries) **panorama**: wide view **woes**: sufferings



*It so happened...*

And he grew ashamed of his useless life  
And his maladies hatched in gloom;  
He opened his windows and let the air  
Of the free heaven into his room.

And out he went in the world and toiled  
In his own appointed way.  
And the people blessed him, the land was glad,  
And the King was well and gay.

JOHN HAY

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

- The King's men were out on a royal errand. Why did they stop to talk to a beggar?
  - What was the beggar's comment?
  - Do you think it is a serious comment? Why?
- What was the beggar asked to do?
  - Did he do it? If not, why?
- What did the King learn from the reports sent by his messengers?
- In what way did the reports affect the King's life?
- Was the King finally cured? If yes, why? (Read the last stanza.)

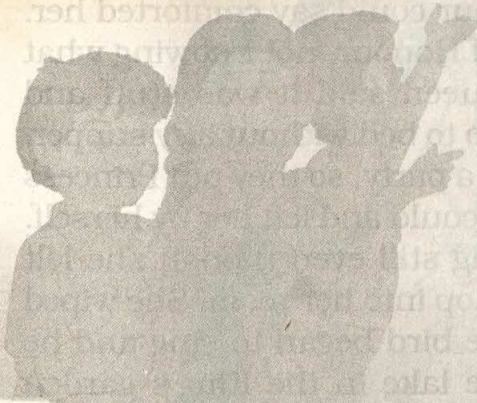
### THINK IT OVER

- The only disability in life is a bad attitude.
- Cooperation is doing with a smile what one anyhow has to do.

**maladies:** ailments **hatched:** conceived **appointed:** special (chosen by the king himself)



## 5

Princess  
September

- Princess September, like each one of her numerous sisters, receives the gift of a parrot in a golden cage on her father's birthday.
- The parrot dies, and by chance a singing bird comes in its place.
- The princess shows off her pet to the sisters who advise her to put it in a cage.

THE King and Queen of Siam had many daughters, and the Queen said that it confused her to have to remember so many names. One day the King decided to call them January, February, March (though of course in Siamese) till he came to the youngest whom he called September.

The King of Siam had a peculiar habit. Instead of receiving gifts on his birthday he gave them. One year on his birthday, not having anything else handy, he gave each of his daughters a green parrot in a golden cage. The princesses were very proud



of their parrots and they spent an hour every day in teaching them to talk. Presently all the parrots could say 'God save the king' and some of them could say 'Pretty Polly' in no less than seven Oriental languages. But one day when Princess September went to say good morning to her parrot she found it lying dead at the bottom of its golden cage. She burst into a flood of tears, and nothing that her Maids of Honour could say comforted her. She cried so much that the Maids of Honour, not knowing what to do, told the Queen, and the Queen said it was stuff and nonsense and the child had better go to bed without any supper. The Maids of Honour wanted to go to a party, so they put Princess September to bed as quickly as they could and left her by herself. And while she lay in her bed, crying still even though she felt rather hungry, she saw a little bird hop into her room. She wiped her tears and sat up. Then the little bird began to sing and he sang a beautiful song all about the lake in the King's garden and the willow trees that looked at themselves in the still water and the goldfish that glided in and out of the branches that were reflected in it. When he had finished, the Princess was not crying any more and she quite forgot that she had had no supper. "That was a very nice song," she said.

The little bird gave her a bow. "Would you care to have me in place of your parrot?" said the little bird. "It's true that I'm not so pretty to look at, but on the other hand I have a much better voice." Princess September clapped her hands with delight and then the little bird hopped on to the end of her bed and sang her to sleep.

When she awoke next day the little bird was still there, and as she opened her eyes he said, "Good morning!" The Maids of Honour brought in her breakfast, and he ate rice out of her hand and he had his bath in her saucer. He began to sing again

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**Oriental:** of the east (The Orient means countries of the Far East. Its opposite is the Occident.) **Maids of Honour:** women attending the Princess





so beautifully that the Maids of Honour were quite surprised, for they had never heard anything like it, and Princess September was very proud and happy.

"Now I want to show you to my eight sisters," said the Princess.

She stretched out the first finger of her right hand so that it served as a perch and the little bird flew down and sat on it. Then, followed by her Maids of Honour, she went through the palace and called on each of the princesses. And for each of them the little bird sang a different song. But the parrots could only say 'God save the king' and 'Pretty Polly'. At last she showed the little bird to the King and the Queen. They were surprised and delighted.

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**perch:** place where a bird sits or rests



*It so happened . . .*

"I knew I was right to send you to bed without any supper," said the Queen.

"This bird sings much better than the parrots," said the King.

"I should have thought you got quite tired of hearing people say 'God save the king'," said the Queen. "I can't think why those girls wanted to teach their parrots to say it too."

"The sentiment is admirable," said the King, "and I never mind how often I hear it. But I do get tired of hearing those parrots say 'Pretty Polly'."

"They say it in seven different languages," said the Princesses.

"I daresay they do," said the King, "but it reminds me too much of my Councillors. They say the same thing in seven different ways and it never means anything in any way they say it."

The Princesses were vexed at this, and the parrots looked very glum indeed. But Princess September ran through all the rooms of the palace, singing like a lark, while the little bird flew round and round her singing like a nightingale.

Things went on like this for several days and then the eight Princesses put their heads together. They went to September and sat down in a circle round her. "My poor September," they said, "we are sorry for the death of your beautiful parrot. It must be dreadful for you not to have a pet bird as we have. So we have all put our pocket-money together and we are going to buy you a lovely green and yellow parrot."

"Thank you for nothing," said September. "I have a pet bird which sings the most charming songs to me and I don't know what on earth I should do with a green and yellow parrot."

"Well, my dear," they said, "it's absurd to talk of *your* bird when the little fellow flies in and out just as he likes." They looked round the room and raised their eyebrows.

---

**vexed:** distressed; worried    **glum:** sad    **put their heads together:** discussed amongst themselves to take a decision





"Do you mind our asking where your bird is now?" they said.

"He has gone to pay a visit to his father-in-law," said Princess September.

"And what makes you think he'll come back?" asked the Princesses.

"He always does come back," said September.

"Well, my dear," said the eight Princesses, "if you'll take our advice you won't run any risks like that. If he comes back, and mind you, if he does you'll be lucky, pop him into the cage and keep him there. That's the only way you can be sure of him."

"But I like to have him fly about the room," said the young Princess September.

"Safety first," said her sisters ominously.

They got up and walked out of the room, shaking their heads, and they left September very uneasy.

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Discuss

1. How many daughters did the royal couple have?
2. Why were they named after the months of the year?

#### Write

1. The king had a peculiar habit. What was it? Why is it called peculiar?
2. (i) What was Princess September's reaction to the loss of her parrot?  
(ii) What was her mother's reaction to it?  
(iii) What do the reactions indicate about the nature and temperament of each?



*It so happened ...*

3. What pulled the Princess out of her gloom?
4. How did the Maids of Honour come to know that the Princess and the bird had become intimate friends?
5. The new bird was full of new songs but the old parrots always repeated themselves. What did they say?
6. What is the king's opinion about his councillors? Why did he form that opinion?
7. (i) The eight princesses made an offer to Princess September. What was it?  
(ii) Why, in your view, did they do it?
8. What did the sisters advise the Princess to do about her bird?

## II

- *Princess September loves the bird far too much to take chances, and acts upon her sisters' advice.*
- *The bird cannot overcome the loss of freedom.*
- *Princess September decides to put the bird's happiness above her own.*

It seemed to Princess September that her little bird had been away a long time. Something might have happened to him. What with hawks and with snares you never knew what trouble he might get into. Besides, he might forget her, or he might take a fancy to somebody else. That would be dreadful. She wished he were safely back again.

Suddenly September heard a 'tweet-tweet' just behind her ear and she saw the little bird sitting on her shoulder. He had come in so quietly and alighted so softly that she had not heard him.

"I wondered what on earth had become of you," said the Princess.

"I thought you'd wonder that," said the little bird. "The fact is I very nearly didn't come back tonight at all. My father-in-law

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**snares:** traps for catching birds or animals    **alighted:** came down



was giving a party and they all wanted me to stay, but I thought you'd be anxious."

Under the circumstances this was a very unfortunate remark for the little bird to make.

September felt her heart go thump against her chest, and she made up her mind to take no more risks. She put up her hand and took hold of the bird. The bird suspected nothing and he was so surprised when she carried him over to the cage, popped him in, and shut the door on him that for a moment he could think of nothing to say. But in a moment or two he hopped up to the ivory perch and said, "What is the joke?"

"There's no joke," said September, "but some of mamma's cats are prowling about tonight, and I think you're much safer in there."

"Well, just for this once I don't mind," said the little bird, "so long as you let me out in the morning."

He ate a very good supper and then began to sing. But in the middle of his song he stopped.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," he said, "but I don't feel like singing tonight."

"Very well," said September, "go to sleep instead."

So he put his head under his wing and in a minute was fast asleep. September went to sleep too. But when the dawn broke she was awakened by the little bird calling her at the top of his voice.

"Wake up, wake up," he said. "Open the door of this cage and let me out. I want to have a good fly while the dew is still on the ground."

"You are much better off where you are," said September.

"Let me out, let me out," said the little bird. And he tried to slip through the bars of the cage, but of course couldn't, and he beat against the door, but of course he couldn't open it. Then



the eight Princesses came in and looked at him. They told September she was very wise to take their advice. They said he would soon get used to the cage and in a few days would quite forget he had ever been free. The little bird said nothing at all while they were there, but as soon as they were gone he began to cry again: "Let me out, let me out."

"Don't be such an old silly," said September. "I've put you in the cage because I'm so fond of you. I know what's good for you much better than you do yourself. Sing me a little song and I'll give you a piece of sugar."

But the little bird stood in the corner of his cage looking out at the blue sky, and never sang a note.

"What's the good of sulking?" said September. "Why don't you sing and forget your troubles?"

"How can I sing?" answered the bird. "I want to see the trees and the lake and the green rice growing in the fields."

"I'll take you out every day," she said.

"It's not the same thing," said the little bird. "The rice-fields and the lake and the willow trees look quite different when you see them through the bars of a cage."

The bird wouldn't sing a song and he wouldn't eat a thing. The Princess was a little anxious at this, and asked her sisters what they thought about it.

"You must be firm," they said.

"But if he won't eat, he'll die," she answered.

"That would be very ungrateful of him," they said. "He must know that you're only thinking of his own good. If he's obstinate and dies it'll serve him right and you'll be well rid of him."

September didn't see how that was going to do *her* very much good, but they were eight to one and all older than she, so she said nothing.

"Perhaps he'll have got used to his cage by tomorrow," she said.

And next day when she awoke she cried out good morning in a cheerful voice. She got no answer. She jumped out of bed and



ran to the cage. She gave a startled cry, for there the little bird lay, at the bottom, on his side, with his eyes closed, and he looked as if he were dead. She opened the door and putting her hand in lifted him out. She gave a sob of relief, for she felt that his little heart was beating still.

"Wake up, wake up, little bird," she said.

She began to cry and her tears fell on the little bird. He opened his eyes and saw that the bars of the cage were no longer around him.

"I cannot sing unless I'm free, and if I cannot sing I die," he said.

The Princess gave a great sob.

"Then take your freedom," she said. "I shut you in a golden cage because I loved you and wanted to have you all to myself. But I never knew it would kill you. I love you enough to let you be happy in your own way."

She threw open the window and gently placed the little bird on the sill. He shook himself a little.

"Come and go as you will, little bird," she said. "I will never put you in a cage any more."

"I will come because I love you, little Princess," said the bird. "And I will sing you the loveliest songs I know. I shall go far away, but I shall always come back and I shall never forget you." He gave himself another shake. "Good gracious me, how stiff I am," he said.

Then he opened his wings and flew right away into the blue. But the little Princess burst into tears, for it is very difficult to put the happiness of someone you love before your own, and with her little bird far out of sight she felt on a sudden very lonely. When her sisters knew what had happened they mocked her and said that the little bird would never return. But he did, at last. And he sat on September's shoulder and ate out of her hand and sang her the beautiful songs he had learned while he was flying up and down the fair places of the world. September



*It so happened . . .*



kept her window open day and night so that the little bird might come into her room whenever he felt inclined, and this was very good for her; so she grew extremely beautiful.

And when she was old enough she married the King of Cambodia and was carried all the way to the city in which he lived on a white elephant. But her sisters never slept with their windows open, so they grew extremely ugly as well as disagreeable, and when the time came to marry them off they were given away to the King's Councillors with a pound of tea and a Siamese cat.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM

[slightly abridged]

**disagreeable** : unpleasant



## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

- Elaborate the italicised parts of the following sentence.  
*Under the circumstances it was a very unfortunate remark for the little bird to make.*
- What did Princess September do to ensure the safety of her pet?
  - How did the bird react to it?
- Why did the bird refuse to be taken out in his cage?
- What persuaded Princess September to give the bird his freedom again?
  - How did the bird react to it?
- Princess September kept her window open day and night.
  - How did it help the bird?
  - How did it help the Princess herself?
- The eight sisters kept their windows shut. How did it affect them?

#### Discuss

- Do you think the sisters are unkind and cruel? Find evidence in the text to support your idea.
- Which, to you, is the most important idea in this story?
  - importance of music
  - value of freedom
  - beauty of nature

Choose the item that seems correct to you. Give a reason for your choice.

### THINK IT OVER

- There are two ways to study butterflies: chase them with nets then inspect their dead bodies, or sit quietly in a garden and watch them dance among the flowers.
- Freedom practises its own logic. It puts a bouquet of rights in your right hand and a basket of duties in your left hand. This is merely to help you walk straight.



## It so happened . . .

- To be free is to be disciplined. Who knew it better than the young enthusiast walking down the road swinging his arms wildly. When he accidentally hit an old gentleman on the tip of his nose, the man asked, "And what do you think you are doing?"  
 "Oh, I'm sorry," said the enthusiast, "but it's a free country. I'm swinging my arms."  
 "Remember," advised the old gentleman, "your freedom ends where my nose begins."





# 6

## The merchant of Venice-I



### I

- *Shylock, the moneylender and Antonio, a prosperous merchant, lived in Venice, and despised each other.*
- *Bassanio, a young gentleman of modest means, was Antonio's best friend.*
- *Antonio was compelled to borrow a sum of money from his enemy to help his dearest friend, and was made to sign a risky bond.*

SHYLOCK, the moneylender, lived in Venice. He had made himself very rich by lending money at high interest to the merchants of Venice, and was generally hated by the people, and particularly by Antonio, a young merchant. Shylock also hated Antonio because Antonio lent money to people in need without charging any interest. Whenever Antonio met Shylock he would taunt him for his hard dealings. This Shylock would bear with seeming patience while he secretly planned to hurt his enemy.

Antonio was a kind-hearted man. He was greatly loved by all his fellow-citizens, but the friend who was dearest to his heart



was Bassanio, a noble Venetian. He had only a small property, which he had wasted by living in a lavish style, as young men of high rank with small fortunes often do. Whenever Bassanio wanted money, Antonio helped him. It seemed as if they had but one heart and one purse between them.

One day Bassanio came to Antonio and told him that he wished to marry a lady whom he dearly loved. Her late father had left her a large property. Not having enough money to propose marriage to so rich a lady, he requested Antonio to lend him three thousand pounds.

Antonio had no money at the time. His ships were sailing on the high seas but would come home soon. He decided to go to Shylock and borrow the money for Bassanio at any interest the moneylender wished.

Shylock thought to himself, 'This is the time to catch him. He hates me. He harms my business by lending out money without interest and he curses me and my good business.'

Antonio, being anxious to get the money, said, "Shylock, do you hear me? Will you lend the money?"

Shylock replied, "Antonio, many a time you have cursed me and I have borne it quietly. You have called me names, taunted me and even kicked me. Now you need my help. You come to me and say, 'Shylock, lend me money'. Why should I help you?"

To this Antonio said, "If you wish to lend me the money, lend it not as to a friend, but rather as to an enemy. If I cannot repay on time, you may punish me the way you like."

Shylock, pretending kindness, said he would instantly lend him three thousand pounds, and take no interest either. Only Antonio should go with him to a lawyer, and sign in merry sport a bond. If he did not repay the money by a certain day, he would lose a pound of his flesh, to be cut off from any part of his body that Shylock pleased.

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**lavish:** rich; luxurious    **small fortunes:** limited amounts of money or income  
**in merry sport:** for fun and amusement; not seriously



This offer greatly surprised Antonio. He said, "I will sign this bond. I must say there is much kindness in the old moneylender."

Bassanio was not in favour of Antonio signing such a bond for him. But Antonio saw no harm in it. Before the day of payment, his ships would have come home. Ignoring his friend's advice, Antonio signed the bond, thinking it was merely in sport.



## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. Why did Antonio and other Venetians hate Shylock?
2. Why did Shylock feel the same for Antonio?
3. Why did Antonio have to take a big loan from his enemy?
4. Why did the moneylender agree to oblige Antonio finally?
5. (i) On what terms was the loan agreed to?  
(ii) Was Bassanio in favour of the condition? If not, why?



## II

- *Bassanio and the beautiful Portia become engaged.*
- *Gratiano and Nerissa follow suit.*
- *A letter from Antonio containing bad news throws the couples into deep gloom.*

The rich lady that Bassanio wished to marry lived near Venice, at a place called Belmont. Her name was Portia, and both in beauty and intellect, she was known to be unparalleled.

Bassanio, being so kindly supplied with cash by his friend at the risk of his own life, set out for Belmont with a splendid team of attendants, and a gentleman-in-waiting by the name of Gratiano. Portia in a short time consented to accept Bassanio as her husband.

Bassanio told Portia that he had little money, and that his high birth and noble family were all that he could proudly speak of. Portia said she loved him for his own sake, and had enough money of her own for both of them. She added that she wished she was a thousand times more beautiful, and ten thousand times more prosperous for the sake of her husband. Presenting a ring to Bassanio, she said, "Myself and what is mine, to you and yours is given. Only yesterday, Bassanio, I was the lady of this fair house, queen of myself and mistress over these servants; and now this house, these servants, and myself are yours, my lord; I give them with this ring."

Bassanio was filled with gratitude and wonder at the gracious way in which the rich and noble Portia accepted a poor man like him. He could only speak a few broken words of love, and taking the ring, he swore never to part with it.

Gratiano and Nerissa, Portia's maid-in-waiting, were with their lord and lady when Portia so gracefully promised to become Bassanio's wife; and Gratiano, wishing Bassanio and the lady joy, asked permission to be married at the same time.

"With all my heart, Gratiano," said Bassanio "if you can get a wife."

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**unparalleled:** without a parallel or equal; unique    **gracious:** kind and generous



Gratiano then said that he loved Portia's fair maid, Nerissa, and that she had promised to be his wife, if her lady married Bassanio. Portia asked Nerissa if this was true. Nerissa replied, "Madam, it is so, if you approve of it." Portia willingly consented and Bassanio pleasantly said, "Then our wedding-feast shall be much honoured by your marriage, Gratiano."

No sooner had the two couples pledged themselves to eternal love and loyalty than there came a messenger with a letter from Antonio containing bad news. When Bassanio read the letter, he turned pale. Portia asked what the news was and he said, "O sweet Portia, here are a few of the saddest words that ever blotted paper. Gentle lady, when I first spoke my love to you, I freely told you all the wealth I had was my noble blood. But I should have told you that I had less than nothing, being in debt." Bassanio then told her of his borrowing money from Antonio, and of Antonio borrowing it from Shylock, and of the bond by



**eternal:** everlasting



*It so happened . . .*

which Antonio had promised to give a pound of flesh, if the bond was not honoured. And then Bassanio read Antonio's letter:

Dear Bassanio, my ships are all lost. I must repay the loan, and since in paying, it is impossible I should live, I would wish to see you at death; but do as you please. If your love for me does not make you come, let not my letter.

"Oh, my dear love," said Portia, "finish your business and go. You shall have gold to pay the money twenty times over, before this kind friend loses even a hair by your fault; and as you are so dearly bought, I will dearly love you."

Portia then said she would be married to Bassanio before he set out, to give him a legal right to her money. They were married the same day. Gratiano was also married to Nerissa. Bassanio and Gratiano, as soon as they were married, set out for Venice where Bassanio found Antonio in prison.

The day of payment being past, the cruel moneylender would not accept the money which Bassanio offered him. He said he must have a pound of Antonio's flesh. A day was fixed for a trial before the Duke of Venice, and Bassanio and Gratiano waited anxiously for the fateful day.

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. Portia said she loved Bassanio for his own sake. What did she mean by that?
2. What news did Antonio's letter contain?
3. How, according to Portia, could the matter be easily sorted out?
4. Why did Portia and Bassanio get married in a hurry?
5. Where was Antonio when his dearest friend was getting married?



## III

- *Disguised as a lawyer, Portia arrives in Venice on the day of the trial.*
- *She tries hard, though in vain, to persuade Shylock to see reason.*
- *The law, she declares, cannot be twisted even to save a life. The moneylender has a chance of settling old scores with Antonio.*

Portia spoke cheeringly to her husband and asked him to bring his dear friend along with him when he returned. Yet she feared it would go hard with Antonio. When she was left alone, she began to think if she could by any means save the life of Bassanio's friend. She quickly resolved to go herself to Venice and speak in Antonio's defence.

Portia had a relation who was a lawyer. His name was Bellario. She wrote to him asking him to advise her and to lend her the dress worn by a lawyer.

The messenger brought from Bellario letters of advice, a lawyer's dress and everything else necessary for her journey.

Portia, wearing the clothes of a lawyer, and Nerissa, also dressed in men's clothes, set out immediately. They arrived in Venice on the day of the trial. Portia entered the court and handed the Duke a letter from Bellario, to the effect that he would not be able to speak for Antonio and that the bearer of the letter, young doctor Balthasar (so he called Portia) might speak instead of him. This the Duke granted, much impressed by the youthful looks of the stranger. Portia looked around her. She saw the merciless moneylender and she saw Bassanio. He was standing beside Antonio, in very great distress and fear for his friend's life.

Portia first addressed herself to Shylock. He had a right, she said, by the Venetian law to have what was promised in the bond. Then she spoke sweetly of the noble quality of *mercy*. "Mercy drops as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place

---

**to the effect that:** with the meaning that; giving the information that



*It so happened ...*

beneath. It is a double blessing. It blesses him that gives, and him that receives it. It is a finer ornament for a king than his crown, because it is a quality of God Himself. Earthly power comes nearest to God's when justice is mixed with mercy. Remember that as we all pray for mercy, that same prayer should teach us to show mercy."

Shylock answered her by insisting on having what the bond promised. "Is he not able to pay the money?" asked Portia. Bassanio said he would pay the three thousand pounds as many times over as Shylock should wish. Shylock refused, and said he must have a pound of Antonio's flesh. Bassanio then suggested that the learned lawyer should twist the law a little only to save Antonio's life. But Portia gravely answered that laws once passed must never be changed. Shylock heard Portia say that the law might not be changed, and thought that she was on his side. And he praised the young lawyer to the skies.

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. Portia worked out a secret plan to save Antonio. What was it?
2. What did Portia tell Shylock first?
3. Summarise Portia's speech on mercy in your own words.
4. (i) What was Bassanio's suggestion to the young lawyer?  
(ii) What was Portia's response to him?
5. What made Shylock admire the lawyer?

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

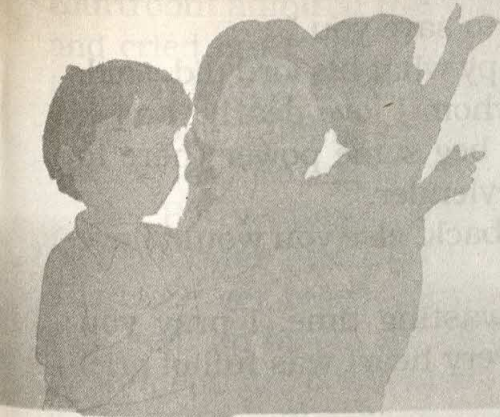
Learn by heart Portia's speech on mercy.

**praised ... to the skies:** praised greatly or profusely



# 7

## The merchant of Venice-II



### I

- Portia examines the bond, and interprets it anew.
- Shylock, overjoyed so far, finds himself trapped.
- The young lawyer wins wide applause.

PORTIA now asked Shylock to let her look at the bond. When she had read it, she said, "By this bond the moneylender may lawfully ask for a pound of Antonio's flesh." Then she said to Shylock, "Be merciful; take the money, and allow me to tear up the bond."

But Shylock said, "Nothing on earth will make me change my mind."

"Why, then, Antonio," said Portia, "you must prepare yourself for the knife." And while Shylock was sharpening a long knife with great eagerness to cut off the pound of flesh, Portia said to Antonio, "Have you anything to say?"

Antonio calmly replied that he had nothing to say. He had prepared himself for death. Then he said to Bassanio, "Give me



your hand, Bassanio! Goodbye. Grieve not that I have fallen into this misfortune. Remember me to your honourable wife, and tell her how I have loved you!"

Bassanio in the deepest sorrow replied, "Antonio, I am married to a wife who is as dear to me as life; but life itself, my wife, and all the world, are not valued by me above your life. I would lose all, I would give all to this devil here, to save you."

And then Gratiano, who loved to copy what his lord did, said, in Nerissa's hearing, "I have a wife whom I love dearly. I wish she were in heaven, if she could but beg some power there to change the cruel temper of this moneylender."

"It is well you wish this behind her back, else you would have trouble in your house," said Nerissa.

Shylock now cried out, "We are wasting time. I pray you pronounce the sentence." And now every heart was full of grief for Antonio.

Portia asked if the scales were ready to weigh the flesh. She said to Shylock, "You must have some doctor ready, lest he bleeds to death."

Shylock was hoping that Antonio would bleed to death. He said, "It is not mentioned in the bond."

Portia replied, "No, it is not mentioned in the bond but it would be charitable to send for a doctor."

Shylock repeated, "I cannot find a doctor. It is not in the bond."

"Well," said Portia, "a pound of Antonio's flesh is yours. The law allows it, and the court gives it to you."

Again Shylock cried out, "What a wise and upright judge! A Daniel come to judgment!" And then he sharpened his long knife again, and looking eagerly at Antonio, said, "Come, prepare!"

"Wait a little," said Portia; "there is something else. This bond here gives you no drop of blood. The words are 'a pound of flesh'.

---

**charitable:** kind    **Daniel:** a wise and upright person (In the Old Testament, Prophet Daniel is renowned for his wisdom.)



If in securing your pound of flesh you spill one drop of his blood, your land and goods are, by the law, to be taken from you and given up to the State of Venice."

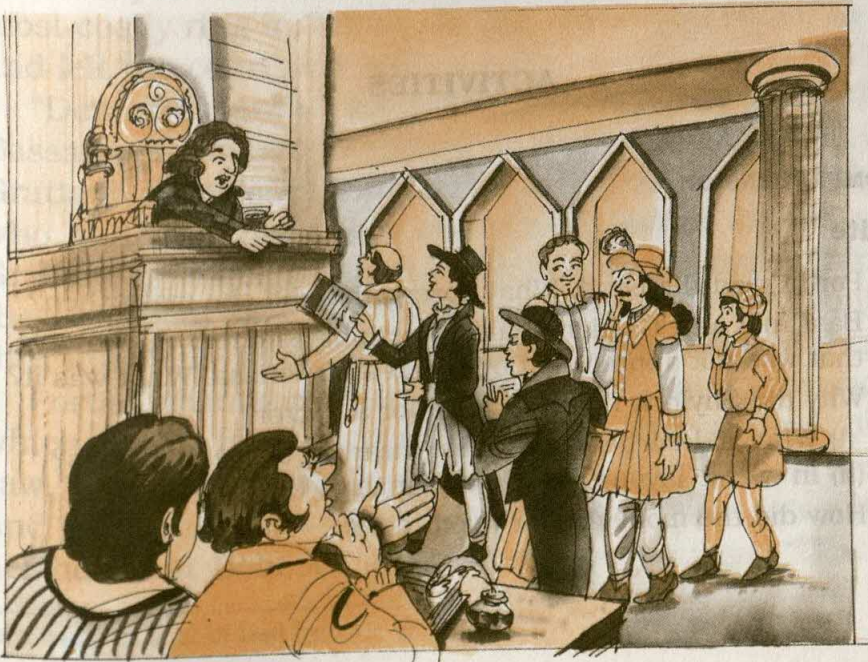
It was impossible for Shylock to cut off the pound of flesh without spilling some of Antonio's blood. Everyone in the courtroom admired the wonderful wisdom of the young lawyer, and cried out in joy. Gratiano said, "What a wise and upright judge! A Daniel come to judgment!"

Shylock, finding himself beaten, said that he would take the money, and Bassanio cried out, "Here is the money!"

But Portia stopped him saying, "Wait. There is no haste. The moneylender shall have nothing but what is in the bond. Therefore get ready, Shylock, to cut off the flesh. But, mind you, spill no blood. And if you cut off more or less than just a pound, you are condemned by the laws of Venice to die, and all your wealth will become the property of the State."

"Give me my money, and let me go," said Shylock.

"I have it ready," said Bassanio. "Here it is."





Shylock was going to take the money when Portia again stopped him, saying, "Wait. I have yet another hold upon you. By the laws of Venice, your wealth will go to the State for having plotted against the life of one of its citizens. And your life is at the mercy of the Duke. Therefore, down on your knees, and ask him to pardon you."

The Duke said to Shylock. "I give you your life before you ask for it, but half of your wealth belongs to Antonio, and the other half goes to the State."

Antonio said that he would give up his share of Shylock's wealth, if Shylock would sign a bond to give it at his death to his daughter and her husband, a friend of Antonio's.

Shylock agreed to this, and very sorrowfully said, "I am ill. Let me go home. Send the bond after me, and I will sign over half my riches to my daughter."

"Go, then," said the Duke, "and sign it; and if you are truly sorry for your cruelty the State will forgive you the fine of the other half of your riches."

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. Portia read the bond. What observation did she make then?
2. Bassanio and Gratiano said something to cheer up Antonio, that was not appreciated by Portia and Nerissa. What was it?
3. Why did Shylock refuse to send for a doctor?
4. (i) What did Portia say the real meaning of the bond was?  
(ii) In whose favour did her explanation tilt the case?
5. How did the moneylender react to it?



## II

- The lawyer takes Bassanio's wedding ring as a souvenir.
- The lawyer's young clerk coaxes Gratiano into parting with his ring.
- At the grand reunion in Portia's villa, admonitions give way to fun, frolic and happiness.

The Duke now set Antonio free, and with his counsellors left the court. Bassanio said to Portia, "Most worthy gentleman, my friend Antonio and I have by your wisdom been saved. I request you to accept the three thousand pounds due to the moneylender."

Portia would not accept the money, but when Bassanio still pressed her to accept a present, she said, "Give me your gloves. I will wear them for your sake." And when Bassanio took off his gloves, she saw the ring which she had given him. She said, "And for your gratitude I will take this ring from you."

Bassanio was sorry that the lawyer should ask for the only thing he could not part with. He replied that he could not give him that ring, because it was his wife's gift and he had promised never to part with it. But he added that he would give him the most costly ring in Venice. At this Portia pretended to be angry and left the court in a huff.

"Dear Bassanio," said Antonio, "let him have the ring." Bassanio, ashamed to appear so ungrateful, relented, and sent Gratiano after Portia with the ring. And then the 'clerk', Nerissa, who had also given Gratiano a ring, asked for his ring, and Gratiano unwillingly gave it to her. And there was laughing among these ladies to think, when they got home, how they would charge their husbands with giving away their rings to some other women.

Portia, when she returned, was in that happy frame of mind which comes from a good action. She enjoyed everything she saw. The moon seemed to shine more brightly than ever before. And when the moon came behind a cloud, she saw a light from her house at Belmont and she said to Nerissa, "That light we

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**in a huff:** in a fit of bad temper or annoyance



see is burning in my hall. How far that little candle throws its beams — so shines a good deed in a naughty world.” And hearing the sound of music from her house, she said, “By night music sounds much sweeter than by day.”

And now Portia and Nerissa entered the house, and dressing themselves in their own clothes, waited for their husbands, who soon followed them with Antonio.

Suddenly Nerissa and her husband started quarrelling in a corner of the room.

“A quarrel already?” said Portia. “What is the matter?”

Gratiano replied, “Lady, it is about a poor little ring that Nerissa gave me.”

“What does the value of the ring matter?” said Nerissa. “You swore to me that you would keep it till the hour of death. Now you say you gave it to the lawyer’s clerk. I know you gave it to a woman.”

“By my honour,” replied Gratiano, “I gave it to a boy no taller than yourself. He was a clerk to the young lawyer who saved Antonio’s life. The boy accepted it for a fee, and I could not for my life say ‘no’ to him.”

Portia said, “You are to blame, Gratiano, to part with your wife’s first gift. I gave Bassanio a ring, and I am sure he would not part with it for all the world.”

Gratiano, in self-defence, replied, “My lord Bassanio gave away his ring to the lawyer.”

Portia, hearing this, pretended to be very angry, and accused Bassanio of giving away her ring to some other woman.

Bassanio was very unhappy to have made his dear wife angry. He said, “No, by my honour, no woman has it, but a lawyer, who refused three thousand pounds and asked for the ring instead. What could I do, dear Portia? I was so filled with shame that I was forced to send the ring after him. Pardon me, good lady. Had you been there, I think you would have taken the ring off me to give it to the good lawyer.”

“Ah!” said Antonio, “I am the unhappy cause of these quarrels. I once did lend my body for Bassanio’s sake; and but for him to





whom your husband gave the ring, I should have now been dead. I can promise you, your husband will never more break his faith with you."

"Then," said Portia, "give him this ring, and ask him to keep it better than the other."

When Bassanio looked at this ring, he was surprised to find it was the same he had given away. And then Portia told him how she became the young lawyer, and Nerissa her clerk. And Bassanio found, to his great wonder and joy, that it was by the courage and wisdom of his wife that Antonio's life had been saved.

Portia again welcomed Antonio, and gave him letters in which there was an account of how Antonio's ships, that were supposed to have been lost, had safely arrived in the harbour. Now it was time to laugh heartily at the strange story of the rings, and the stranger husbands who did not know their own wives.

[adapted from Lamb's Tales  
from Shakespeare]

---

**break his faith with:** break his promise to; be disloyal to



## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. Did Portia really want Bassanio's gloves? If not, what was she angling for, and why?
2. Why did Bassanio agree to break the promise he had made to his wife?
3. On their return to Portia's house, Nerissa and Gratiano started quarrelling. What was the quarrel about?
4. What softened the 'angry' wives in the end?
5. What was the news in the letter that Portia gave Antonio?





# 8

## Grandpa fights an ostrich

- Grandpa, accompanied by his dog, takes a short cut through the hills.
- He walks across an ostrich farm on the way.
- A fierce-looking ostrich runs towards him while the dog is chasing a hare far away.

Before Grandfather joined the Indian Railways, he worked for some time on the East African Railway, and it was during that period that he had his famous encounter with the ostrich. My childhood was frequently enlivened by this oft-told tale of my grandfather's, and I give it here in his own words—or as well as I can remember them.

WHILE engaged in the laying of a new railway line, I had a miraculous escape from an awful death. I lived in a small township, but my work lay some twelve miles away, and although I had a tent on the works I often had to go into town on horseback.

**encounter:** sudden meeting (usually unpleasant)    **enlivened:** made more lively and cheerful    **miraculous:** unexpected, like a miracle



*It so happened ...*

On one occasion, an accident happening to my horse, I got a lift into town, hoping that someone might do me a similar favour on my way back. But this was not to be, and I made up my mind next morning to do the journey on foot, shortening the distance by taking a cut through the hills which would save me about six miles.

To take this short cut it was necessary to cross an ostrich 'camp' or farm. To venture across these 'camps' in the breeding season, especially on foot, can be dangerous, for during this time the male birds are extremely ferocious.

But being familiar with the ways of ostriches, I knew that my dog would scare away any ostrich which tried to attack me. Strange though it may seem, even the biggest ostrich (and some of them grow to a height of nine feet) will bolt faster than a



**ferocious:** fierce/violent and hence dangerous



racehorse at the sight of even a small dog. And so, in company with my dog (a mongrel who had adopted me the previous month), I felt reasonably safe.

On arrival at the 'camp' I got through the wire fencing and, keeping a good lookout, dodged across the spaces between the thorn bushes, now and then getting a sight of the birds which were feeding some distance away.

I had gone about half a mile from the fencing when up started a hare; and in an instant my dog gave chase. I tried to call him back although I knew it was useless, since chasing hares was a passion with him.

Whether it was the dog's bark or my own shouting, I don't know, but just what I was most anxious to avoid immediately happened: the ostriches became startled and began darting to and fro. Suddenly I saw a big male bird emerge from a thicket about a hundred yards away. He stood still and stared at me for a few moments; then, expanding his wings and with his tail erect, he came bounding towards me.

- What could poor Grandpa do except dodge the huge bird as long as possible?
- Beaten at the dodging game, Grandpa becomes attached to one of the creature's massive wings.
- To his great joy, Grandpa watches the ostrich on the run and his truant friend all over him.

Believing discretion to be the better part of valour (at least in that particular situation), I turned and ran towards the fence. But it was an unequal race. What were my steps of two or three feet against the creature's great strides of sixteen to twenty feet?

---

**mongrel:** dog of mixed breed; ordinary rather than pedigreed **gave chase:** ran after (the hare) **darting :** moving quickly **thicket:** mass of shrubs and small trees **discretion:** good/balanced judgment **valour:** bravery [**Discretion is the better part of valour** (saying): There is no point in taking unnecessary risks.]



*It so happened . . .*

There was only one hope: to wait for the ostrich behind some bush and try to dodge him till he tired. A dodging game was obviously my only chance.

Altering course a little, I rushed for the nearest clump of bushes where, gasping for breath, I waited for my pursuer. The great bird was almost immediately upon me, and a strange encounter commenced. This way and that I dodged, taking great care that I did not get directly in front of his deadly kick. The ostrich kicks forward, and with such terrific force that his great chisel-like nails, if they struck, would rip one open from head to foot.

Breathless, and really quite helpless, I prayed wildly for help as I circled the bush, which was about twelve feet in diameter and some six feet in height. My strength was rapidly failing, and I realised it would be impossible to keep up the struggle much longer; I was ready to drop from sheer exhaustion. As if aware of my condition, the infuriated bird suddenly doubled on his course and charged straight at me. With a desperate effort I managed to step to one side. How it happened I don't know, but I found myself holding on to one of the creature's wings, close to its body.

It was now the bird's turn to be frightened, and he began to turn, or rather waltz, moving round and round so quickly that my feet were soon swinging out almost horizontally. All the time the ostrich kept opening and shutting his beak with loud snaps.

Imagine my situation as I clung desperately to the wing of the enraged bird, who was whirling me round and round as if I had been a cork! My arms soon began to ache with the strain, and swift and continuous circling was making me dizzy. But I knew that if I relaxed my hold, a terrible fate awaited me: I should be promptly trampled to death by the spiteful bird.

---

**chisel:** a tool with a sharp cutting edge at the end for shaping wood, etc.  
**infuriated:** enraged    **waltz:** dance performed by a couple    **trampled:** crushed under the feet





Round and round we went in a great circle. It seemed as if my enemy would never tire. But I knew I could not hold on much longer.

Suddenly the bird went into reverse! This unexpected movement not only had the effect of making me lose my hold but sent me sprawling to the ground. I landed in a heap at the foot of the thorn bush. In an instant, almost before I had time to realise what had happened, the ostrich was upon me. I thought the end had come. Instinctively I put up my hands to protect my face. But, to my amazement, the great bird did not strike.

I moved my hands from my face, and there stood the ostrich with one foot raised, ready to rip me open! I couldn't move. Was the bird going to play with me like a cat with a mouse, and prolong the agony?

---

**sprawling:** falling awkwardly (with the arms and legs spread out loosely)  
**prolong:** lengthen



As I watched fascinated, I saw him turn his head sharply to the left. A second later he jumped back, turned, and made off as fast as he could go. Dazed, I wondered what had happened. I soon found out, for, to my great joy, I heard the bark of my truant dog, and the next moment he was jumping around me, licking my face and hands.

Needless to say, I returned his caresses most affectionately! And I took good care to see that he did not leave my side until we were well clear of the ostrich 'camp'.

RUSKIN BOND

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Discuss

Surely you had an unexpected encounter with someone some time. Describe it.

#### Write

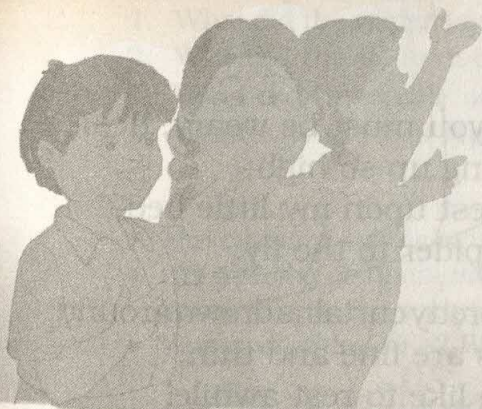
1. Why did Grandpa decide to do the return journey on foot and through the hills?
2. Why would crossing an ostrich farm be dangerous?
3. Why, then, was Grandpa sure he would be safe?
4. What, according to Grandpa, made the big bird attack him?
5. What is meant by "a dodging game"?
6. What happened to Grandpa when the ostrich "went into reverse"?
7. (i) When did the big bird look frightened?  
(ii) How did he show his fear?

**made off:** ran away    **truant:** absent; missing [**play truant** (idiom): stay away from school without permission]



# 9

## The spider and the fly



- *The wily spider invited the little fly into his web.*
- *The fly, though simple, knew the spider's intention well and refused.*
- *The spider coaxed and cajoled her but the fly did not relent.*

"Will you walk into my parlour?"  
said the spider to the fly;

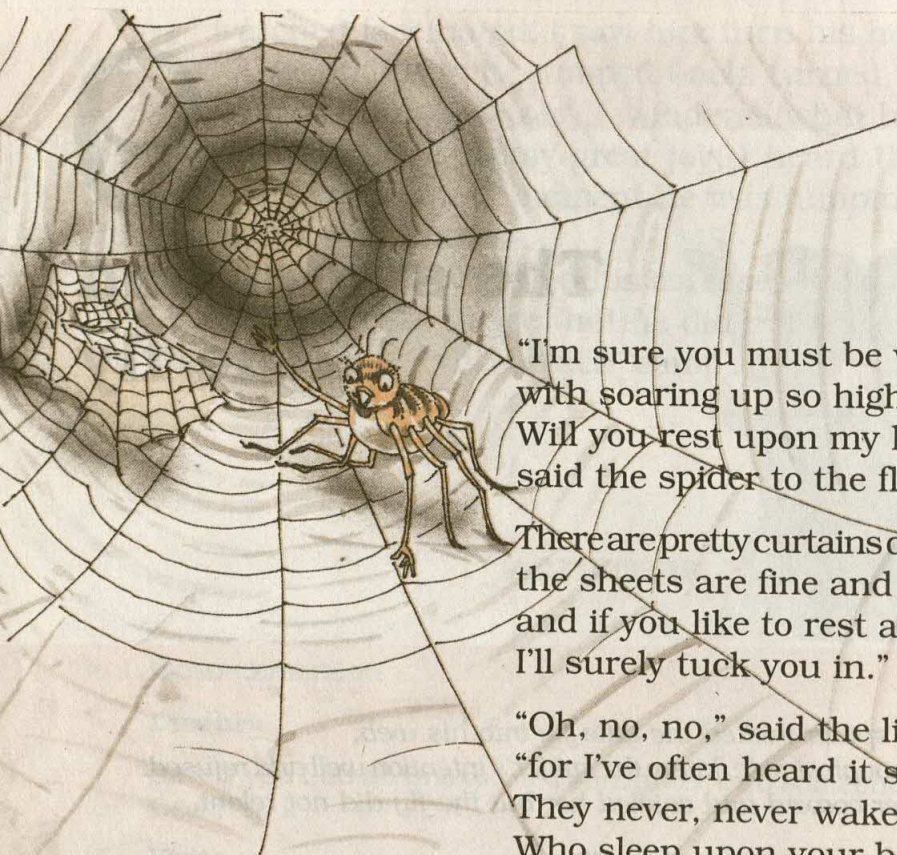
"This is the prettiest little parlour  
that ever you did spy;  
The way into my parlour is up a winding stair,  
and I have many curious things to show  
when you are there."

"Oh, no, no," said the little fly,  
"To ask me is in vain,  
for who goes up your winding stair  
can ne'er come down again."

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**parlour** (not commonly used): sitting-room    **spy**: see/notice    **curious**: strange/  
unusual/rare    **who**: whosoever





"I'm sure you must be weary, dear,  
with soaring up so high;  
Will you rest upon my little bed?"  
said the spider to the fly.

There are pretty curtains drawn around;  
the sheets are fine and thin;  
and if you like to rest awhile,  
I'll surely tuck you in."

"Oh, no, no," said the little fly,  
"for I've often heard it said:  
They never, never wake again  
Who sleep upon your bed."

Said the cunning spider to the fly:

"Dear friend, what can I do  
to prove the warm affection  
I've always felt for you?  
I have within my pantry  
good store of all that's nice;  
I'm sure you're very welcome—  
Will you please take a slice?"

"Oh, no, no," said the little fly,  
"Kind sir, that cannot be;  
I've heard what's in your pantry,  
and I do not wish to see."





**ACTIVITIES****COMPREHENSION****Write**

1. What did the spider say to tempt the fly into his parlour? (line 3-7)
2. Why did the fly turn down the invitation? (lines 10-11)
3. What did the spider say to prove his affection for the fly?
4. What was the fly's reply to that?

- *The cunning spider was an expert flatterer too.*
- *His glowing compliments softened the fly's resolve, and she flew back close to the web to hear her admirer better.*
- *Was everything fine? Well, your guess is no worse than mine.*

"Sweet creature," said the spider,  
"You're witty and you're wise,  
How handsome are your gauzy wings,  
How brilliant are your eyes!

I have a little looking glass  
upon my parlour shelf;  
if you'll step in one moment, dear,  
you shall behold yourself."

"I thank you, gentle sir," she said,  
"for what you are pleased to say,  
and, bidding you good morning now,  
I'll call another day."

The spider turned him round about,  
and went into his den,  
for well he knew the silly fly  
would soon come back again.

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**gauzy:** soft and transparent like silk/silken    **him:** himself



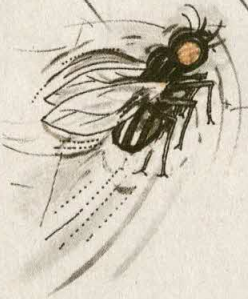
*It so happened . . .*

So he wove a subtle web  
in a little corner sly,  
and set his table ready to dine  
upon the fly.

Then he came out to his door again,  
and merrily did sing:

"Come hither, come hither, pretty fly,  
with the pearl and silver wing.  
Your robes are green and purple—  
there's a crest upon your head;  
your eyes are like the diamond bright,  
but mine are dull as lead!"

Alas, alas! how very soon this little fly,  
hearing his wily, flattering words,  
came slowly flitting by.



With buzzing wings she hung aloft,  
then near and nearer drew,  
thinking only of her brilliant eyes  
and green and purple hue,  
thinking only of her crested head—  
poor foolish thing! At last  
up jumped the spider  
and fiercely held her fast.  
He dragged her up his winding stair,  
into his dismal den,  
within his little parlour—  
but she ne'er came out again.

**crest:** tuft of feathers on a bird's head   **wily:** crafty/cunning   **flitting:** moving quickly and lightly   **hue:** colour   **dismal:** gloomy



And now, dear children,  
who may this story read;  
To idle, silly, flattering words  
I pray you ne'er give heed;  
Unto an evil counsellor close heart  
and ear and eye,  
And take a lesson from this tale  
of the spider and the fly.

MARY HOWITT

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. What did the spider say to flatter the fly?
2. Did the spider think his flattery was working? Quote appropriate lines in support of your answer.
3. While praising the fly, the spider once belittles himself to please her better. Reproduce the appropriate lines.
4. Why does the poet call the fly "poor foolish thing"?
5. What lesson does the poet teach through the tale of the spider and the fly?

### THINK IT OVER

- When a person who has never flattered you suddenly discovers all your qualities, he either wants to con you or needs something urgently from you. ('To con' is to swindle after gaining one's trust.)
- Be generous in complimenting others. The secret of happiness is to make others believe they are the cause of it.
- Praise is to flattery what truth is to falsehood.



# 10

## A clash of titans



### I

- Rustam, the legendary warrior, had to return to Persia leaving his wife in a foreign land.
- She gave birth to their son, Sohrab, but chose to tell Rustam it was a daughter.
- Sohrab longed to meet his father and proclaim himself as his worthy son.

ONCE upon a time there lived in Persia a great warrior called Rustam. His strength was so great, and his bravery so boundless, that he came to be known as the Shield of Persia. His great war cry of 'Rustam!' would send armies flying in terror.

It so happened that once in his wanderings Rustam found himself in a foreign land where, amid the noise of arms and the din of battle, he fell in love with a princess. With the consent of

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**titans:** persons of great size, intellect, strength, importance, etc. **boundless:** without limits; great





the king, her father, they were soon married. After a few happy months, Rustam had to return to his own land, where another danger had risen. In great sorrow he parted from his loving bride. He gave her a piece of marble, which was his seal, as a gift for the baby who would soon come to them. The Champion of Persia went back once more to the wars, leaving his wife in a distant land.

A few months later, she became the mother of a boy, and called him Sohrab. She knew that Rustam longed for a son and heir. She feared that if he knew of the boy's birth he would very soon send for him. So she sent word to Rustam that a daughter had been born to them.

Sohrab, which means 'child of many smiles', grew up into a handsome, strong, and spirited boy, and it was not till he was a young man that his mother told him the secret of his birth and his father's name.



*It so happened ...*

On hearing that he was the only son of the great Rustam, the boy's heart was filled with joy and pride. He began to dream of following in his father's footsteps. In spite of the tears of anguish and entreaties of his mother he collected an army and set out to find the Champion of Persia and proclaim himself his son.

As Sohrab, the hero of the Tartar army, moved on, he heard new stories of his father's bravery. He also learnt a great deal about the reigning Shah of Persia, Kai Koos. He made a secret resolve to unseat that monarch and place Rustam, so much more fitted to rule, on the throne. But terrible difficulties lay in his way. Kai Koos set all kinds of traps to kill the spirited youth, of whom he knew nothing except his name. But Sohrab, with his army around him, came near and nearer still.

When Kai Koos saw that this uncontrollable boy was offering him war in earnest he sent for Rustam, little knowing what he did. And so the weeks passed until one day the armies of Kai Koos and Sohrab met on a wide plain, and the youth challenged the Persians to single combat.

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. What used to happen when Rustam shouted his own name on the battlefield?
2. Why did Rustam leave his seal with his wife when he left for Persia?
3. Why did Rustam's wife inform him they had a daughter, not a son?
4. When Sohrab came to know he was Rustam's son, what did he decide to do?

**anguish:** sorrow    **entreaties:** earnest requests/pleadings    **proclaim:** declare  
**in earnest:** seriously    **single combat:** fight between two persons



## II

- Sohrab challenges the Persian warriors to a personal combat.
- The announcement fills the enemy with fear.
- Only one warrior among them could rise to the occasion.

It was early morning. The soldiers were asleep in their tents, but Sohrab lay awake. He had not slept the whole night. This was the day, he thought, when his long-cherished desire to see his legendary father was to be fulfilled. Too restless to remain in bed any longer, he got up, put on his soldier's uniform and made for the old general Peran Wisa's tent.

Peran Wisa was still asleep in his soft bed. Sohrab's footsteps, although noiseless, woke him up and rubbing his sleepy eyes, he shouted, "Who's there?"

"It's me, Peran Wisa", said Sohrab. Peran Wisa at once recognised the voice of his favourite commander and requested him to sit by his side on the soft bed.

PERAN WISA: The day hasn't fully dawned yet. Why are you up so early?

SOHRAB: I do not bring news of any disaster. I've come at this unusual hour to tell you of a secret desire which keeps me awake.

PERAN WISA: Secret desire?

SOHRAB: Yes, General. Do you know that I have never seen my father? I hoped to meet him among the Persian army one day. Alas! that hope has not been realised yet. Now I have a plan.

PERAN WISA: A plan to meet your father! What is it?

SOHRAB: Let there be no battle between the two armies today. I'll challenge the Persian chiefs to single combat with me. My father, being the most gallant of all, will surely come forward.

PERAN WISA: You've never seen your father. How will you recognise him?





SOHRAB: He'll recognise me. He'll enquire about me and that will soon lead to the revelation of our relationship. This is my plan for finding out my father.

Peran Wisa said that in his opinion the plan might not work. If Sohrab was really so anxious to see his father, he should rather go in search of Rustam than invite him to a fierce combat. The weakness of the plan, the wise general said, was that Rustam no longer took a leading part in every battle as he used to do before. Now he lived a life of retirement.

But Sohrab was insistent. Finally, Peran Wisa said that as far as he was concerned, Sohrab was free to do what he liked. And he dropped Sohrab's hand in despair.

When they came out of the tent, the day had fully dawned. The troops were marching out of their camps and arranging themselves in battle order on the plain. Peran Wisa stopped his men from advancing further, and made this announcement in a loud voice:

"Let there be truce between the hosts today.

But choose a champion from the Persian lords

To fight our champion Sohrab, man to man."



The announcement filled the Persian army with fear and dismay. They knew that Sohrab was the bravest of warriors and his success in single combat was certain. Fortunately for the Persians, Rustam had arrived on the scene the night before. The best thing, they thought, would be to go to Rustam and secure his consent to fight Sohrab on their behalf. Having decided that, the Persians formally accepted Peran Wisa's challenge.

### ACTIVITIES

#### COMPREHENSION

##### Write

1. Why was Sohrab not able to sleep the whole night?
2. What was his plan to meet his illustrious father?
3. Why did Peran Wisa say Sohrab's plan might not work?
4. Sohrab's victory in single combat was certain. Why, then, did the Persians accept Peran Wisa's challenge?

### III

- Rustam is reluctant to come forward.
- In his view, a younger person patronised by the king should meet Sohrab's challenge.
- Eventually, he agrees to protect the dignity of the Persian army.

Rustam sat in his tent like an emperor, playing with a falcon perched on his iron wrist. He had just finished his breakfast and was waiting for his attendants to remove the articles of food left unfinished.

Just then Gudruz, an officer in the Persian army, entered the tent.

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**dismay:** feeling of shock and discouragement



*It so happened . . .*



RUSTAM: Welcome, Gudruz. Come in and have some breakfast.

GUDRUZ: No, thanks. Matters more urgent than breakfast demand our attention now.

RUSTAM: *[laughing]* Nothing is more urgent than breakfast in the morning. What is it, my dear friend, which makes you look pale on a bright day like this?

GUDRUZ: The enemy has proposed single combat between one of our warriors and their champion, Sohrab. We have accepted it. Sohrab is the youngest and bravest of them all. Our soldiers, dear Rustam, are neither young nor too brave. Help us, or we'll be disgraced.

RUSTAM: *[smiling]* Nonsense! If the Persian soldiers are old, I am older still. King Khusro is fond of young men and promotes them to better positions. Old warriors like me no longer fight, but sit in their gloomy tents lonely and neglected. Go to one of the king's younger favourites.



GUDRUZ: Rustam, if you don't meet Sohrab's boastful challenge, the Persians will lose. Think how Sohrab will acquire greater fame, and the world will laugh at us.

RUSTAM: Do I care if Sohrab becomes famous? Why should I fight for King Khusro or any one else? Do they reward merit or good service? No, Gudruz, I am determined never to engage in warfare again.

GUDRUZ: I'm surprised at your diffidence, Rustam. Perhaps you doubt your own strength; perhaps you can no longer take on a powerful enemy like Sohrab. This is cowardice.

RUSTAM: Who dare accuse Rustam of cowardice?

GUDRUZ: The whole world will accuse Rustam of cowardice if the Persians lose. You'll be blamed by one and all. Sohrab wants to fight Rustam. He has said so.

RUSTAM: Don't be so bitter, my friend, even in jest. If Sohrab wants to fight Rustam, it is Rustam he'll fight, but without knowing it. It isn't cowardice or an idle desire to preserve my fame that made me refuse to fight. I will fight in disguise. Let no man say of Rustam that he was matched in single combat with a young soldier.

Gudruz scarcely believed what he heard. Overcome by fear at Rustam's wrath and by joy at his consent, he turned to go to his commander with the happy news.

## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Discuss

1. Why was Rustam unwilling to accept the Tartar's challenge?
2. What finally persuaded him to rise to the occasion?

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**diffidence:** reluctance (showing lack of confidence)



## IV

- Rustam and Sohrab see each other for the first time.
- Neither wants to attack the other for different reasons.
- They fight. The truth dawns on Rustam too late.

There was a narrow strip of sand between the two armies as they stood arranged in battle order. Rustam advanced to the frontline of the Persian army. Sohrab, fully armed, came through the frontline of the Tartar army. They were now face to face, observing each other closely.

Then Rustam said, "Young man, why do you seek an early death? Look at me. I have fought many bloody battles and killed countless enemies. It is rash of you to wrestle with me. Come over to my side and live with me as my own son. The Persians will be proud of you."

It seemed to Sohrab that his own father Rustam was standing in front of him. Hope filled his heart. He ran towards Rustam, clasped his hands in his own and said, "Tell me truly if you are Rustam."

"Why should you know my name?" Rustam thundered. "I am a Persian soldier ready to fight with you in response to your challenge. Either carry out your boastful threat or surrender."

"Vain boasts never frighten me", Sohrab replied. "If you were Rustam, I wouldn't fight you. But you are a stranger. You may be strong and experienced, but victory does not depend upon a man's prowess, but on the will of God."

Rustam hurled his spear at Sohrab, who escaped the blow easily. Then Sohrab hurled his spear at Rustam, which hit Rustam's shield but couldn't pierce it. Angry, Rustam picked up his huge club and threw it at Sohrab who dodged it again. The club dropped on the sandy field. Rustam too fell down and dug his fingers into the soft sand. Here was a chance for Sohrab

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**prowess:** bravery in battle; skill and ability



to kill his opponent, but Sohrab gazed at Rustam's shield and said. "The sight of you fills me with strange tenderness. You don't make me angry. I wonder who you are. Why do I love you so? Let's make peace with each other. Do you know Rustam? I have never seen him. Tell me stories of his exploits."

Rustam raised himself from the ground. He was panting with rage. Now he taunted Sohrab, "You effeminate creature! Stop your prattle and fight."

These taunts provoked Sohrab to anger and he drew his sword. They flew at each other blindly and fiercely. They shouted and dealt each other mighty blows. Suddenly everyone heard the war cry of 'RUSTAM'. Rustam, in extreme rage, had shouted his own name. Sohrab heard the sweet sound of his dear father's name. It so overwhelmed him that he dropped his shield. The next minute the troops saw Sohrab lying wounded and Rustam standing safely at a distance.

RUSTAM: [*scornfully*] You were a fool to have hoped to kill me. You have received a fatal blow. You are dying.

SOHRAB: You boastful man! It wasn't you who killed me. I met my death on account of my respect and affection for my father's name. I could have killed ten warriors like you if you had not shouted 'Rustam'. Now Rustam, my father, will avenge my death.

RUSTAM: Rustam, your father? I don't believe it. Rustam's son, indeed! Rustam has no son.

SOHRAB: [*feebly*] Yes, he has. I am his only son. When he hears of my death and the name of the coward who killed me, he will follow you like the shadow of death. Beware, unlucky man.

RUSTAM: [*confused*] Where does your mother live?

SOHRAB: She lives far away in her royal father's house. She won't ever see me again.



## ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION

#### Write

1. What was Rustam's advice to Sohrab?
2. Why didn't Sohrab kill Rustam when there was a chance for him to do so?
3. What made Sohrab drop his shield? What happened then?
4. What made Rustam believe he had killed his own son?
5. What was Sohrab's last wish?

### THINK IT OVER

- Chance usually plays a leading role in the drama of life.
- Success is the outline of a rest house on the horizon. Effort is the uneven path leading towards it. Destiny is the vehicle in which one arrives.

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Read the poem 'Sohrab and Rustam' by Matthew Arnold.

